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SCHOOL DISTRICT ORGANIZATION FOR THE 1970'S.

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FROM 1932 TO 1965, THE NUMBER OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE UNITED STATES DECREASED FROM 127,649 TO 26,802. IN NEW ENGLAND, HOWEVER, THERE WAS A DECREASE OF LESS THAN 100 DISTRICTS. NEW ENGLAND IS IN THE PROCESS OF CONVERTING FROM AN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY TO AN ELECTRICAL AND TECHNICAL ECONOMY. SCHOOL REDISTRICTING MUST OCCUR ALONG WITH THIS CONVERSION. THERE ARE THREE MAJOR FORCES WHICH WILL PRECIPITATE A REVISION OF SCHOOL DISTRICTING PATTERNS--(1) THE IMPATIENT LAYMAN WHO REFUSES TO FINANCE SMALL SECONDARY AND GRADE SCHOOLS, (2) FEDERAL PROGRAMS WHICH OFFER VARIOUS INCENTIVE PACKAGES, AND (3) TEACHERS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS WHO DESIRE MORE MANAGEABLE JOBS AND MORE HUMANE WORKING CONDITIONS. REDISTRICTING INTO SCHOOL DISTRICTS SERVING 50,000 STUDENTS WOULD RESULT IN A DECREASE IN THE NUMBER OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN NEW ENGLAND FROM 1,609 TO 48. SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR REORGANIZATION WILL COME FROM (1) CULTURAL CHANGES, (2) ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY AND THE LEVEL OF CIVILIZATION REQUIRING AN UPDATING OF OUR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM, AND (3) THE RECOGNITION THAT THE VERY EXISTENCE OF THESE STATES IS IN JEOPARDY. (HW)

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School District Organization for the 1970's

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The topic is not new; the theme is familiar. Horace Mann urged the reduction in the number of school districts well before the 1870's. Lord Bryce, visitor to the United States, wrote in 1891 that "in some states provision is made for the combination of several school districts to maintain a superior school at a central spot."[1] Between 1882 and 1909 the six New England states abolished a grand total of 13,000 school districts by consolidating many thousands of village and neighborhood school districts into about 1600. The opposition to that reorganization was bitter, well-organized and highly effective for many decades, according to contemporary observers.[2]

The national record on school district reorganization over the last thirty years is nothing short of spectacular, from 127,000 school districts in 1932 to 27,000 in 1966. The states consolidated 100,000 school districts and abolished as many boards.

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Table I. Reduction in U.S. School Districts 1932-1965

Year	Number of School Districts in U.S.
1932	127,649
1948	105,971
1953	67,075
1961	36,402
1965	26,802

Sources: School District Organization--Journey that Must Not End, Washington, D.C., National Education Association, 1962; and (for 1965-66) the NEA Research Bulletin, Vol. 44, No. 2, May, 1966, Washington, D.C., National Education Association.

Of course these data include more than 10,000 Illinois school districts, 3000 apiece

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in Iowa and Wisconsin and other large-scale mergers which resemble the New England performance of the turn of the century. Yet a second major wave of school district reorganizations has only recently begun to reach New England. Between 1932 and 1962 the net decrease in the total of New England school districts was less than 100. The stability of the 1600 districts over a fifty year period is quite remarkable given the forces at play elsewhere in the nation. The task of accounting for that stability was accomplished by David Peterson in a Maine Law Review article, "School Districts: New England Style."[3] The task instead is to look ahead to the planning decisions for the 1960's. The first relevant question is, "What Will New England be like in the 1970's?"

The Future of New England

For some of the answers we must turn to the economists and planners. Other visible trends seem destined to continue--the frightening extension of urban and suburban sprawl in every direction from Boston and the other large cities, including from New York into Connecticut. New England is clearly affected by the huge strip city which now stretches from Bangor, Maine to Norfolk, Virginia. By highways, commerce and mass media we are all linked to this "megalopolis."[4] Much of New England appears to remain rural, sparsely populated and only partially tied to the urban places, but the isolation and traditional independence is but an illusion. Swift turnpikes allow the tourists and other travelers quick access to the far reaches of the region; great bombers and fast fighters roar from the forests in the northernmost and other parts of this six-state complex. The specialization of agriculture, the new contributions to the space industry, the continued relevance of our machine tools and insurance skills, the infinite variety of our centers of advanced education--each make the inhabitants of these states interdependent. Despite ourselves, we constitute a region.

Martin Meyerson in 1961 commented that he found how almost every town in southern New Hampshire had an electronics plant or small precision industry. "We can't afford those land prices on Route 128" or "in Technology Square back of M.I.T." So the engineers and managers go to Peterborough or Keene and draw on a labor force which, with the automobile, is capable of living within a radious of twenty-five and even fifty miles.

The Vermont Development Department in June of 1966 bought a half-page ad in the Boston Sunday Globe to lure highly skilled professional and technical persons from the congested central city. Vermont has jobs and is booming, the ad suggested. "Yet, Vermont has no really big cities with snarled transportation, strife, crime, bureaucratic waste, poor housing, air pollution and all the other seemingly hopeless problems of large metropolitan areas today." After the virtues of Vermont living were laid out in some detail the ad listed these Vermont employers: General Electric, IBM, Simmonds Precision Products, Union Carbide, Vermont Research Corporation, and indeed the State of Vermont--and no one can overlook state and local governments as sources of new demands for highly trained persons in research, data processing, and a host of professional skills. The list of people needed in Vermont included:

Community Planners
Engineers (nine types, from Aerospace to Water Pollution)
Veterinarians
Tool Makers and Designers
Technical Writers
Systems Analysts
Psychologists and Social Workers
Occupational Therapists
Technicians (all kinds, to support the above)

Vermont is our least populous state. It ranks low in per capita personal income, lowest in total personal income, and has had the slowest rate of population growth of the six New England states--but Vermont has properly diagnosed its manpower needs and understands the shift to a more technical and "service" oriented

economy as predicted by John Kenneth Galbraith.[6]

A recent Arthur D. Little economic study of New England projected dramatic increases in the dollar output of electrical machinery, chemicals and allied products by 1980 and beyond.[7] Each of the six states will share in this expanded output. For example, New Hampshire also will decrease the share of persons employed in agriculture or traditional manufacturing but increase many times the numbers employed in electrical machinery (from 9000 in 1960 to 53,000 in 2020). The year 2020 is quite close--the sixty year olds of that year enter first grade this September. As the New England economy grows so will school programs grow increasingly scientific and oriented to technology and professional services.

The Scope and Costs of Schooling in this Region

What pupil loads will the schools of 1970 carry, with what staff assistance, and at what cost to the states? The Council of State Governments already worries and publishes projections of these costs for 1970.[8] The projections assume a need for additional teachers and space, additional supplementary staff, after-school programs and summer school opportunities for more children, increased teacher salaries and replacement of urban facilities.

The Council predicts 2,370,000 public school students enrolled in the New England states in the fall of 1970, an increase of half a million over 1960 enrollments. The growth rate for 1962-1970 is, except for Connecticut, less than half what it was from 1954 to 1962 largely because of the levelling off of the birth rate nationally and regionally. What is new is a pre-primary enrollment of almost 100,000, half of it in Massachusetts and one-quarter of it in Connecticut. This projection may be quite conservative, of course, although made after Public Law 89-10 was enacted. This increase in enrollments and reductions in class size will require more than 20,000 teachers in 1970 than in 1960 but we are assured that the

bumper crop of 1948 babies will be finishing college that year and that the prospects of a teacher shortage are slight. Of course the average salaries in the six states will have climbed--to $6271 in Maine and to $9207 in Connecticut, the latter to remain competitive with New York State. The current expenditures for schools in 1970 will climb to one and ¼ billion dollars --or an increase in each state of from fifty to eighty per cent above 1960-61 levels. So much of the new revenue could come from Federal sources than by 1970 the Congress may in the case of four New England states raise and appropriate more money for education than the state legislatures. (See Table II) So increased costs are inevitable, but the local share will decrease, the Federal share increasing most of all despite improved state finance programs.

Table II. General Revenue for Local Schools, by Source, by State, by Calendar Year 1970 (Projected)

State	(figures in millions) Total Revenue	Federal	State	Local
Maine	145.9	26.9	24.6	94.4
New Hampshire	68.6	15.5	3.7	49.3
Vermont	55.0	10.2	8.9	35.8
Massachusetts	740.7	124.5	108.8*	507.4
Rhode Island	103.6	23.5	25.1	55.1
Connecticut	437.0	59.7	109.1	268.2
Total: New England	1,550.8	260.3	280.3	1,010.2

*This figure was estimated prior to the passage of a sales tax in Massachusetts and revision of the state aid formula for education.

Source: Local School Expenditures: 1970 Projections, The Council of State Governments, Chicago, Ill., 1965, p. 63.

Forces Behind Revision of School District Organization

Figures alone simply suggest patterns of growth and an expansion of some of the present problems. Yet, they also support the argument that new and additional

forces will precipitate a revision of school districting patterns.

The first major force will come from impatient laymen who will refuse to finance small secondary schools and still smaller grade schools (both with high per capita costs, limited libraries and special services and a slim base on which to remedy gaps in program offerings). Neither will these laymen, whether on state boards or on key legislative committees, continue to finance administrative units which seem to perpetuate the problem--be they township districts, supervisory unions or small (e.g. two-town) regional or cooperative districts. The archetype of this layman is probably Jesse Unruh in California who from the legislature periodically threatens local school boards with a state bill substituting eighty county units for the many hundreds of school districts. In recent years sparsely settled states such as West Virginia or Nevada by legislative fiat reduced to a few dozen the total number of school districts. The General Assembly of Georgia in 1964 directed the state board to search for "efficiency, economy and higher quality in equalizing educational opportunities for all children" even if it meant considering multiple-county units.[9] So even the county unit is seen as too small in many instances. A state board of education chairman said recently and with fervor, "We cannot and will not continue to pour state school funds into ratholes," and he mentioned as illustrations some small, expensive, unreorganized school districts. Clearly the impetus for new organization will come from certain friends as well as from critics of the schools as presently organized.

The second major factor will be the federal programs with their variously packaged incentives. Public Law 874 earlier reinforced the status quo but Title III of E.S.E.A. rewards multi-district efforts to collaborate in model projects. It is the federal intention that exemplary projects, when worthwhile, be imitated and adopted by other sets of districts--if that be the economical and sensible unit for adoption, and in many instances a single township won't be large enough

by itself to adopt a new program. Certainly the latest Vocational Education Act, for better or worse, has stimulated inter-district communication, although in Massachusetts, as with regional secondary schools, the opportunities for merging whole districts and committees have not always been maximized. In New Hampshire superintendents ask that Titles I, II and III of E.S.E.A. be administered at the supervisory union level rather than at the district or township level where the red tape multiplies and the dollars are so divided up that the separate districts get less of a program for children than what they might secure if in a coalition. This argument parallels those for joint construction of secondary school facilities and libraries for which federal aid presumably is on the way.

The third force rises from the desire of both teachers and school administrators for a more manageable job and for more humane working conditions. Few teachers want to teach three or four grades, with the full span of student abilities, nor do high school teachers cherish up to five preparations in two or more different subject specialties, let alone grades. Teachers also want to work in schools where specialists, especially in library services, special education and guidance (including access to a school psychologist), can help with materials and with deviant pupils. Some also want audio-visual equipment and colleague support in the same subject area beyond that which a school of less than 500 students can usually offer.

The superintendents in supervisory unions ache to combine budgets, reports, and committees which now duplicate each other under the name of "local control." The lot of such superintendents resembles the situation described by the visitor to the U.S. who noticed that "every time one American meets another, one pulls out a gavel and calls the other one to order." Superintendents not only want to shake the role of "jack-of-all-trades;" they also want to be able to delegate the increasing load of detailed paper work and project management to specialized assistants. The one man, one clerk central office is now obsolete. Superintendents want and

will insist on help in business details of purchasing and accounting, in elementary instruction (especially supervision, materials selection and teacher recruitment), and in school construction, transportation and other supporting services. For these New England superintendents an improved lot requires consolidation of districts and abolition of a few hundred superintendencies.

Other forces, such as those generated by racial imbalance in a number of New England cities, may also influence patterns of school organization but the above list includes the major factors to which state leaders will respond.

Models for Reorganization

The third great question is how will the districts re-organize. What will be the patterns? One can project from the experiences of other states, some of whom have experimented more or suffered growth pains in more vivid ways than has New England. On the other hand, many of the models are in New England already in prototype form.

First, it must be acknowledged that one model or one pattern may not suffice. For example, the rural cooperative or regional district may lack relevance for the city and its suburbs. Instead, a variety of models of school government below the state level may be needed.

Of oourse, the boldest stroke of all would entail the abolition of present districting patterns and, with the exception of arrangements to honor school construction bonds, a fresh start in organizing and financing the schools of a state. Colorado, Nevada and West Virginia legislatures took such painful but promising steps and survived, even prospered. Jefferson County, Colorado is a model of how some 39 small school districts can be welded into a vigorous, innovative and achievement-oriented school district. Clark County, Nevada is another "lighthouse district" which blends city with rural areas and upgrades the quality of school ser-

vices and school buildings in both types of communities.

Charles Benson, after a heady interlude studying school finance in Great Britain, argues that we should ruthlessly jettison our present structures. He advocates, in The Cheerful Prospect, school districts which would serve a total population of about 250,000 and therefore about 50,000 students.[10] Only with this number can a district offer a full array of offerings in vocational education to hold students through graduation and properly prepare for careers in technology and the arts, most likely with a junior college component also. In fact, for the latter he wonders whether 400,000 citizens might be needed to support a pre-kindergarten to grade 14 program. His proposals include the hiring of fifteen academic scholars in content areas, not the methods-oriented supervisors or consultants as now known. Such a dynamic approach to in-service education and curriculum development is envisioned that only a large school district could support this scheme. Districts the size of Dade County, Florida, for which Benson and others developed details for staffing an in-service program, meet the criteria laid out in The Cheerful Prospect. At the 1970 projections this could mean a grand total of forty-eight districts for New England.

Table III. "The Cheerful Prospect": Impact on New England
(assuming school districts of 50,000 pupils)

	Pupil Enrollment (in thousands)		Number of School Districts		
	1960	1970	1961	1970	(if so organized)
Maine	205	224	462	5	
New Hampshire	106	139	230	3	
Vermont	75	85	262	2	
Massachusetts	838	1,116	438	22	
Rhode Island	135	161	41	3	
Connecticut	480	654	176	13	
Total: New England	1,839	2,379	1,609	48	

Sources: Council of State Governments (op. cit.), p. 17 and N.E.A., School District Reorganization (op. cit.), p. 9 with 1970 number of school districts calculated with reference to Benson's specifications. Few blueprints for reorganization are more sweeping than Benson's and yet some allowance is made here, as he suggests, for sparsity in some states.

Few men have served N.E.S.D.E.C. and the region with more devotion than Charles Benson. Few consultants know the obstacles for such a scheme as well. In 1962, in a N.E.S.D.E.C. report on the costs of school indebtedness he wrote, "'Home rule,'...'direct participation in government,' 'local responsibility,' these are all part of a political myth that continues to thrive in the sparse soil of New England. Political values, as deeply ingrained as these, die hard, but in a Yankee America that is increasingly beset with metropolitan problems, there are indications that the temples of the old gods are being abandoned."[11]

Political scientists, of course, for the better part of this century developed schemes for the reorganization of local governments around the central cities on a metropolitan basis. This thankless task now breeds cynicism and lengthy studies of why citizens won't accept metropolitan governments other than for very specialized services or crises such as for sewage, fresh water and mosquito abatement. On the other hand, the number of examples where a city and adjoining territory merge for school purposes seems to grow: Nashville, Tennessee, Dade County, Charlotte-Mecklenberg, North Carolina and elsewhere in the South and West.[12] Districts such as Los Angeles include both city and suburbs, stretching in that case well out into the San Fernando Valley.

Schoolmen invest much energy in combining small districts, especially those of a rural nature and with small populations. Fine schools grow out of such mergers and coalitions although often the very poor are frozen out or the very rich towns, the lake front resorts or public utility towns, boycott even the study phase. Cities and big towns seem self-sufficient and contribute to the larger question of adequate schooling mainly by accepting students on a tuition basis--when space allows. The formation of new and larger districts all around but not including a large school district must be questioned and, indeed, <u>is</u> under current New Hampshire legislation which creates Authorized Regional Educational Areas as

city-town "engagements" en route to possible "marriage" in cooperative school districts. Despite qualms about the city-small town value cleavages the end result of superior program offerings and staff services must serve as the rationale for a new look at the possibilities.

That change can occur after relatively short periods of planning and with proper financial incentives can be seen in the very recent emergence of metropolitan councils in the towns surrounding Hartford and Boston. Although the special and initial thrust of these councils is that of finding remedies for racial imbalance the genesis of these councils augurs well for some expansion. Here the argument need not run to super-districts which transform fifty towns and cities into one super-district with uniform standards pegged at the average of what prevailed previously. Indeed, the central city school district itself must be decentralized and debureaucratized so that components can vie for specialized programs and the diverse needs of sub-groups can be recognized. It is possible for a city such as Boston and several dozen other towns to form from five to eight quasi-independent school districts of moderate size, each shaped as the wedge of a pie and characterized by cultural diversity and varied opportunities.[13] The best of the current schools would remain in operation and students would leave their own neighborhoods only to secure some superior or specialized offering. A central metropolitan district would support a school in the performing arts, laboratory or demonstration schools and other scarce but exciting programs.

Sources of Support for Reorganization

The several state legislatures contain outspoken opponents of school district reorganization. Much time and thought gets invested in how to move controversial education bills through the parliamentary obstacle course. Nevertheless one finds grounds for a "cheerful prospect" for improved organization of schools.

First is a report by Edgar Litt on The Political Cultures of Massachusetts.[14] What he finds, in analyzing voting behavior since World War I, is applicable to other states in this region as well. He develops the notion of four cultures, spokesmen for each of which we can identify. One culture is that of the Patrician, motivated to engage in public service and representative of the old stock lineage which still shapes nationally the economy through the institutions of law and finance. Next is that of the Yeoman, rooted in the past and dwelling in small towns, self-sufficient and attuned to the stability of rural life. The culture of the Workers flourishes in cities where the network of family, social and ethnic ties remains strong and "solidarity" is the overriding characteristic. Finally, the culture of the Manager builds on the ethos of "rational progress" embraced by the Professional-technical class of increasingly new stock heritage. The Patrician, frustrated at the state level, often goes on to assume national responsibilities. The Yeoman and the Worker resist change or "reforms" for different reasons and sometimes join forces. The Managers want for themselves and their offspring access to professional, technical and institutional reform and increasingly transcend party and religious lines to form a coalition with the Patricians as necessary. What is significant is that the pool of Yeomen is shrinking and the voting power of professionals and Managers increasing. The Yeoman-Worker coalition has sometimes served as a buffer against change but Litt predicts increasing pressure for a more rational more efficient political economy based on merit, efficiency, equal rights and improved services generally. These developments, in so far as they can be applied to proposals for shaping school organization, augur well for such rational reforms as will improve school services for children.

The next source of optimism rises from the increasing recognition that advances in technology and our level of civilization require an updating of our educational system. Excerpts from the June 1966 issue of the Review of Educational

Research show how bleak are the alternatives to reorganization:

> "Ginsberg (1965) pointed out that automation, cybernation, and technological improvements had increased the demands for scientific and professional workers but decreased the need for unskilled labor. Semiskilled and unskilled jobs were being eliminated, and the poorly educated were finding it increasingly difficult to locate work. Watson's (1963) report stated that 'automation means there is no room at the bottom of the ladder of educational skills.' ...'Science and technology have moved so swiftly that advanced education is no longer a luxury,' declared President Johnson (1964). 'It is a necessity.' Technology also brought mechanical and electromechanical instruments or 'hardware' into the classroom. Kvaraceus (1965) described 'highly automated classrooms and cubicles,' complete with teaching machines, tapes, discs, television hookups, radio, films, filmstrips, classroom computers, and retrieval systems."[15]

Information on these trends and the implications for upgrading school programs and program facilities must find its way into the hands of governors whose leadership in the area will be crucial. One has only to note the success of Volpe of Massachusetts in waiting out the opponents of new taxation, or the triumph of King of New Hampshire in building vocational and technical institutes, to see that gubernatorial leadership is crucial in the major campaigns for improved education, its organization and finance.

States finally will change because they are on notice that their very existence is in jeopardy. The continued erosion of state authority may lead to a day when, as Senator Dirksen has expressed it, "The only people interested in state boundaries will be Rand McNally." Senator Joseph Tydings reminds us in the March 1966 Harpers that, "Jefferson warned that the only way to prevent the encroachment of federal power into areas beyond its proper sphere is to strengthen state governments. Although reapportionment has been a bitter medicine for some of our state legislators to swallow, it is the long needed prescription to bring our federal system back to life. It is the last chance for the states."[16]

Tydings leaves out the additional and related reform appropriate in some New England states--reduction of the size of the legislatures so that the increas-

ed volume of business can be transacted expeditiously. Vermont by its example here paves the way. The reform of the state legislatures is inexorably tied to the reform of school district organization in the next decade and, like the withering away of the Governor's Council in Massachusetts, such changes could come about fairly rapidly if the public supported such changes.

Thus do we anticipate the triumph of rational men who share some of our professional values, do we inform the major leaders of the expensive changes required for, and stemming from, technological advances, and finally do we support certain measures to streamline decision-making at the state level generally. All three factors generate optimism about the prospects for reorganization.

The six states of New England may not merge in our time. What Al Simpson fondly dubbed the "State of New England" was in many ways his private vision, for few others see the unity of this region so clearly. Suddenly the idea takes new meaning, however, as a regional laboratory forms. The need for such a superstructure flows out of a larger need for access to ideas, to men with expert knowledge about curriculum and teaching practices, and to specific information about alternative choices in solving educational problems. Today we view schools as a state and local enterprise. Tomorrow we see this region better organized for curriculum development, for regular and specialized school services, for innovation and dissemination of information. In this quest for improved structures may we keep in mind the extent to which none of the communities are islands, no state a natural entity, and not even the region a completely logical or self-contained unit for research or development. No one form of organization automatically solves our problems, but the present mode of organization, if retained, may exacerbate those problems already at hand.

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